

Message Text

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47

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PBOR, EI, NI (UK)

SUBJECT: JUSTICE MINISTER PROPOSES DROPPING CLAIM ON NORTH

1. JUSTICE MINISTER COONEY, SPEAKING SEPTEMBER 20, MADE A "PERSONAL" SUGGESTION THAT REFERENDUM BE HELD TO DELETE ARTICLES 2 & 3 OF IRISH CONSTITUTION. THESE ARTICLES CLAIM SOVEREIGNTY OVER ENTIRE ISLAND, INCLUDING NORTH, AND REFLECT OLD IRISH ASPIRATION FOR UNITY. COONEY ARGUED THAT CONSTITUTIONAL CLAIM IS INEFFECTIVE & REPRESENTS A THREAT TO NORTHERN PROTESTANTS. HE THEREFORE SAW ARTICLES AS A BARRIER TO IRELAND-WIDE RECONCILIATION. THIS ARGUMENT HAS OFTEN BEEN MADE BY OTHERS IN RECENT MONTHS, BUT NEVER BY A GOVERNMENT MINISTER.

2. SPOKESMEN OF OPPOSITION FIANNA FAIL PARTY ROUNDLY CONDEMNED COONEY'S PROPOSAL. LEADER JACK LYNCH SAID: "I DO NOT THINK ANY GOVERNMENT IS ENTITLED TO ABANDON THE LEGITIMATE ASPIRATIONS OF THE IRISH PEOPLE."

3. SPOKESMAN FOR NORTHERN SDLP ALSO OBJECTED TO COONEY'S PROPOSAL, BUT WITH SOME EMBARRASSMENT. JOHN HUME POINTED OUT THAT REFERENDUM ON ARTICLES 2 AND 3 WOULD END BIPARTISAN NORTHERN POLICY IN REPUBLIC, WHICH WOULD BE DANGEROUS MOVE, AND WOULD ALSO

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STRENGTHEN IRA CLAIM TO BE "CUSTODIANS OF THE NATION." HUME IND-

ICATED, HOWEVER, THAT HE WOULD BE WILLING TO CONSIDER CONSTITUTIONAL CHANGE "WHEN THE UNIONISTS" ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES SIT AROUND A TABLE WITH ELECTED REPRESENTATIVES FROM THE REST OF THE COUNTRY TO DISCUSS CONDITIONS FOR PEACE." ANOTHER SDLP SPEAKER, SEAMUS MALLON, WAS LESS RESTRAINED: " IT IS HIGH TIME THAT MEMBERS OF THE DUBLIN GOVERNMENT CLARIFIED THEIR ATTITUDE TOWARDS THE NON-UNIONIST POPULATION OF THE NORTH. I FOR ONE AM SICK AND TIRED OF THE WAY IN WHICH CERTAIN SENIOR CABINET MINISTERS HAVE ATTEMPTED TO ISOLATE THE MINORITY POLITICALLY AND LEAVE THEM TO THE TENDER MERCIES OF A DISINTERESTED BRITISH GOVERNMENT AND A UNIONIST POPULATION WHOSE AVOWED AIM IS TO RE-ESTABLISH A PROTESTANT ASCENDANCY GOVERNMENT IN THE NORTH."

4. DUBLIN PAPERS WERE ALSO UNIFORMLY CRITICAL OF COONEY'S APPROACH. "IRISH TIMES" BLASTED GOVT FOR BEING SO UNCOORDINATED THAT ANY MINISTER COULD PUT FORWARD A "PERSONAL"VIEW OF SO SERIOUS A PROBLEM. "IRISH PRESS" REGRETTEED THAT COONEY'S PROPOSAL WOULD STRENGTHEN IRA AND "DO NOTHING TO ENHANCE THIS GOVERNMENT'S REPUTATION FOR HONEST DEALINGS AMONG THE UNIONIST COMMUNITY."

5. FACED WITH THIS REACTION, COONEY WITHDREW HIS SUGGESTION, SAYING THAT THERE WOULD BE NO POINT IN HOLDING A REFERENDUM AGAINST FIANNA FAIL OPPOSITION.

6. COMMENT: ALMOST EVERY OBJECTIVE OBSERVER OF THE IRISH "TROUBLES" AGREES THAT, IN PRINCIPLE, IT WOULD BE HELPFUL FOR THE REPUBLIC TO DROP ITS FORMAL CLAIM ON THE NORTH. SOME DAY IT WILL PROBABLY HAPPEN. UNFORTUNATELY, COONEY HAS PROBABLY SET THE DAY BACK BY MAKING THE PROPOSAL AT THE WRONG TIME AND IN THE WRONG WAY. NO DOUBT HIS INTENTIONS WERE GOOD. THE RESULTS APPEAR TO BE BAD:

-- OPPOSITION LEADER LYNCH HAS BEEN FORCED INTO A STRONG NEGATIVE STAND, WHICH SERIOUSLY DAMAGES THE CHANCES OF A CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM. YET LYNCH, GIVEN A CHANCE, WOULD PROBABLY HAVE TRIED TO LEAD HIS PARTY GRADUALLY IN THE DIRECTION COONEY ADVOCATES.

-- COONEY'S PROPOSAL UNDERCUTS THE POSITION OF THE SDLP WITH BOTH MODERATE AND "REPUBLICAN" VOTERS, AND THIS DURING AN ELECTION CAMPAIGN. THE SDLP CANNOT TAKE A POSITION ON THE PROPOSAL THAT LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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WILL SATISFY EITHER GROUP.

-- THE INEVITABLE REJECTION OF COONEY'S PROPOSAL GIVES NORTHERN PROTESTANTS ANOTHER COMPLAINT AGAINST THE REPUBLIC.

-- THE MASS OF SOUTHERN IRISHMEN HAVE ANOTHER REASON TO FEEL CONFUSED AND DISORIENTED. COONEY (AND OTHERS) ARE ERODING THE TRADITIONAL MYTHOLOGY ABOUT "NATIONAL AIMS" WHILE OFFERING NOTHING

BY WAY OF REPLACEMENT.

7. FOR PAST SEVERAL MONTHS, GOI HAS MADE A STRING OF BLUNDERS
ON MATTERS RELATED TO NI. THE TREND IS STILL REVERSIBLE, AND THE
GOVT DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE IN SERIOUS TROUBLE. IT DOES, HOWEVER,
BADLY NEED TO SHOW THAT IT CAN EXERCISE LEADERSHIP ON THIS ISSUE.
MOORE

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